Written evidence submitted by Nigel Nicholson (RUT0028)

This is submitted on my own behalf as a private individual, who frequently uses the countryside for recreation (walking and visiting tourist attractions) and has a great interest in the wellbeing of the local (North Yorkshire) farming and tourist economy.

My primary concern is the detrimental impact the proposed Shale Gas Extraction industry (fracking) will have on the rural economy in North Yorkshire (and elsewhere in the UK).

- Access – The road network in rural areas (and certainly in North Yorkshire) comprises small “A” roads and a vast number of “B” and smaller, roads. Fracking will require a huge number of large vehicle to bring in not only construction materials but, more significantly, a continuous stream of of water for the process and toxic waste after the process. Tourism and farming rely almost exclusively on this very limited network for access. Upgrading is not really an option as it would impact hugely on the character of the area to the detriment of visitor experience.

- Planning and Regulation - National parks and areas of natural beauty which draw vast numbers of visitors to our country must be protected from industrialisation and pollution or the people simply won’t return. Legislation must be robust to prevent this, or the tourism industry in many areas will be lost – Certainly not the aim of this worthy inquiry.

- Local environment and character – The experience of “Fracking” in North America and Australia has shown that both the character and environment in areas where it has been carried out have been irreparably damaged. Large swathes of farmland have been lost in Pennysylvania – perhaps less significant in the huge expanses of the USA, but absolutely of appalling consequence in our much smaller country. Our farmland provides not only food, but also the very character of much of our countryside and is under pressure from many other areas at the moment. This could finish it, and the rural town and villages it supports, off permanently. In terms of water and air pollution, there are new scientific reports emerging all the time from respected Universities and other agencies in the USA showing links between fracking activities to various health issues from asthma to cancer (carcinogens have been found in high levels along with Methane, Ethane and radioactive substances). With the consequent fall in house prices (eg. this year’s Bristol University study of the effect of the earthquakes caused by fracking near Blackpool in 2011), the threat of currently thriving rural communities withering away must be very real.

In conclusion, to quote from the government’s Draft DEFRA Report (1st July 2015) –

“Shale gas may transform a previously pristine and quiet natural region, bringing increased industrialisation. As a result, rural economy businesses that rely on clean air, land, water
and/or a tranquil environment may suffer losses from this change, such as agriculture, tourism, organic farming, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.”

I support your inquiry’s aims very strongly and wish you well in engaging with people who support the rural economy in order to get the most out of our beautiful country, but I fear that if the Shale Gas Industry is allowed to invade our precious resource, the future looks bleak.

I hope you will take my submission into consideration – I know there are a huge number of people who are very concerned (witness 4,375 objections to the KM8 drilling application in north Yorkshire).

I confirm I am not a member of any environmental group, merely a concerned member of the public who has done some research.

August 2016